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NICOLAUS OLAHUS 450

Tagungsband der internationalen Konferenz
zum 450. Todestag von Nicolaus Olahus

Herausgegeben von
EMŐKE RITA SZILÁGYI



WIEN 2019

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on the 450th Anniversary of Nicolaus Olahus' Death

Edited by EMŐKE RITA SZILÁGYI

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Grabstein von Nicolaus Olahus in Trnava/Nagyszombat/Tyrnau (1568)

Foto: Kornél Divald (1927)

EDITORIAL PROCEDURES AND TYPES OF CENSORSHIP

On the Upcoming Critical Edition of Nicolaus Olahus' Correspondence

“The last guardian of the classical traditions of Hungarian humanist letter-writing was Miklós Oláh. [...] Oláh was the last person to have edited a collection of letters following the models set by the Hunyadi generation. He even gave the collection a title reminiscent of ancient classics, “*Epistolae familiares*” (Letters to friends) obviously following Cicero,” writes Sándor V. Kovács in the foreword to his collection of the Hungarian translations of the letters of fifteenth and sixteenth-century humanists in Hungary.¹ Miklós Oláh, or according to his Latinized name, Nicolaus Olahus (1493–1568), was not only the last in the series of great collators of collections of letters in the Hunyadi and Jagiellonian era (Johannes [Vitéz] de Zredna, Petrus de Varad) but certainly also the most prolific author of all: the collection of letters he compiled,² with its 582 pages, only contains selected material from between 1527 and 1539 (the so-called Brussels period). However, based on the later (1539–1568) material that has been uncovered so far, that material only comprises approximately half of all extant material.³

Epistolae familiares, or as it is commonly referred to, *Collection of letters*, was also published in 1875 by Arnold Ipolyi, and due to the lack of a modern critical edition, that is the edition still in use today.⁴ Ipolyi's merits are beyond dispute: thanks to his edition, an interpretative reading of Olahus' correspondence could begin, as well as a discovery of his relationships, to the extent that it was made possible by the publication. However, the contemporary charac-

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¹ V. Kovács, 1971, 39.

² Budapest, MNL OL, P 108 Rep. 71, Fasc. 23. Henceforth: Ms.

³ According to current research, more than one thousand missives are known which were either written by Olahus or were addressed to him.

⁴ OLÁH, 1875.

teristics of the edition (it does not contain either a critical apparatus or notes of explanation or interpretation), and the lack of knowledge concerning the as of yet unexamined material of the later period often could have resulted in the wrong impression in the reader, and so a new edition has long been necessary, as already pointed out by Gilbert Tournoy.⁵ As a colleague of the Institute for Literary Studies Research Centre for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, since 2013 my task has been to prepare a modern critical edition of the Olahus correspondence, and the first step has been the publication of the *Collection of letters (Epistolae familiares)* also published by Ipolyi.

Olahus first compiled the material of *Collection of letters (Epistolae familiares)* from the correspondence at hand, then he had them copied by several scribes, and he finally emended the collection thus created. If the reader only has access to Ipolyi's edition and does not have the opportunity to handle the original manuscript, they will probably never know that Olahus as editor made substantial changes to the text. Only part of these are grammatical or stylistic corrections, and a significant number of "corrections" were aimed to change the meaning of the text, and sometimes to delete or censor entire passages.

The first volume of the new critical edition has been prepared during the last few years and published at the end of 2018.⁶ It will be followed by two additional volumes, the first of which will also still partly contain the material of *Epistolae familiares*. In the following I will present Olahus' authorial profile based on the traces of editorial and self-censoring processes observed while preparing the first volume.

Why did he censor his texts? Looking at his vita, he appears to have been a successful statesman, ecclesiastical leader, and illustrious humanist. In order to succeed, it was not enough to be polite and intelligent, he had to be cunning and considerate as well. In consideration of his life, I can confirm that he constructed this image consciously. First of all, he remains a faithful Catholic, he is loyal to the Habsburgs, and last but not least, he is a famous and distinguished humanist in his own right. What he had to conceal from his readership while constructing his own image and how he did it, I will briefly discuss below.

⁵ "In addition, the edition by Ipolyi has proved to be extremely useful in mapping the intellectual and political networks all over Europe and especially in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, I should like to suggest here that of the priorities of Hungarian Neo-Latin scholarship should be to replace this edition as soon as possible, its many flaws in transcription, especially of geographical names, and its complete lack of explanatory notes tending to be frustrating or misleading for the reader." – TOURNOY, 2006, 131.

⁶ OLAHUS, 2018.

II. OLAHUS AS EDITOR AND CENSOR

II. A. BACKGROUND: *EPISTULAE FAMILIARES*

It is commonly understood that after the battle of Mohács, Nicolaus Olahus left Hungary with the dowager Queen, Mary of Habsburg. They hesitated in deciding whether to return to Hungary. In the end, in 1531 the Queen was appointed Governor of the Netherlands, so they travelled to Brussels and settled down there. Olahus composed the bulk of his literary works, the historical pieces *Hungaria* and *Athila*, and a couple of his poems in this voluntary exile. There has been a lively discussion in the literature concerning the precise time of Olahus' return home from Brussels. In his later chronicle (around 1558), the so-called *Chronicon breve*, he writes that "In the year 1539, Most Honored Lord Nicolaus Olahus returned from Flanders to Vienna and Hungary,"⁷ although there is no proof of his return during that year. It can only be stated with certainty that he assembled his collection either in Brussels or immediately upon his return to Hungary.⁸ He collected, selected, and had copied a number of his letters into the so-called *Epistulae familiares*, after which he corrected the text himself. I argue that he composed the collection around 1539, preparing his return home and his forthcoming ecclesiastical and political career. The dating of the composition is suggested by the collection itself because the final letter in the collection is dated 4 March, 1539 (in Brussels). Furthermore, after returning home, he composed no significant literary work: on the one hand, he no longer needed such a portfolio; on the other hand, he most probably had no time for writing or a literary occupation.

II. B. TYPE ONE: EDITING AND CENSORSHIP

Although there are several examples of his corrections and censorship, I will demonstrate only three types. These types represent three different levels of his editorial practices. The first one shows it at the level of syntax, the second at the level of selection and disposition, the third at the level of the simple existence of the document in question.

Type one, editing and censorship, comes at the level of syntax. In 1527 Archdeacon and Royal Secretary Imre Kálnay wrote Olahus a letter, sharing his plan for a pilgrimage to Częstochowa (in Poland). The original manuscript no longer exists, but I assume that the *scriptor* copied the letter verbatim for Olahus' collection. Olahus emended the copies *manu propria*, which, in

⁷ "Anno 1539. Reverendissimus D. Nicolaus Olahus, rediit ex Flandria Viennam, et Hungariam." – *Chronicon breve*, in: OLAHUS, 1558, 5 (but the pages are not numbered).

⁸ According to Neagu, he composed his collection after 1553, see NEAGU, 2003, 181.

this letter, seems an important correction. The *scriptor* (and I suppose Kálnay himself) writes: “And I have promised that I would not go anywhere until I had fulfilled this vow. Although you Lutherans might laugh, I consider it to be of true piety and religion. I will soon travel to the Holy Land to become a good Christian throughout.”⁹ The phrase *vos Lutheriani quamvis irrideatis* was corrected by Olahus to read *quod Lutheriani quamvis irrideant*. Obviously, Olahus excluded himself from the Lutherans. In the literature the Flemish court of Queen Mary is accused of sympathy towards the Lutherans several times, certainly because the court priest of the Queen, John Henckel, converted to Lutheranism. Whether the new doctrines had an effect on Olahus is not yet clearly known. But in 1539, when he composed his collection of letters in preparation for becoming a Catholic bishop, he did not want to see himself mentioned among Protestants, despite this witticism. Furthermore, the intention of Olahus has been realized since Arnold Ipolyi’s edition (because all scholars researching Olahus’ letters have used Ipolyi’s edition), which only shows the corrected versions and contains no critical apparatus.

II. C. TYPE TWO: SELECTION AND DISPOSITION (INCLUDING OMISSIONS)

Apart from censoring certain words or sentences, Olahus also effectuated other types of censorship. The second type shows his editorial habits at the macro level, that is at the level of the construction of the collection. *Epistulae familiares* contains 612 items, but this collection does not completely correlate to a new critical edition of his correspondence. Among his correspondence, he admits that of others (such as the one between Erasmus of Rotterdam¹⁰ and Queen Mary) and a few of his own orations. One letter by Olahus was copied into the collection twice, by two different hands,¹¹ and it should also be noted that Ipolyi omitted one letter from his edition by accident.¹² Based on the context, already Ipolyi stated that Olahus had omitted several letters

⁹ “Et promisi me non ante alio iturum, quam hoc quod feci votum exsolvero, quod vos Lutheriani quamvis irrideatis, ego tamen talia pro vera duco pietate et religione, brevi etiam in Terram Sanctam iturus, ut totus bonus Christianus evadam.” – OLÁH, 1875, 2; and OLAHUS, 2018, 53–54.

¹⁰ Interestingly, he also omitted a(t least another) letter from *Epistolae familiares* which he had written to Erasmus, either on purpose or by accident, see NAGY, 2011, 140.

¹¹ Olahus ad Amicum, Ghent, 21 May, 1531; Ms. 044. and Ms. 227–228. Edition: OLÁH, 1875, 130; and OLAHUS, 2018, 212–213.

¹² Olahus ad Amicum, Brussels, 23 July, 1533; Ms. 422–423. The new edition already includes it: OLAHUS, 2018, 507.

from his collection.¹³ These include, for example, a couple of letters by Olahus addressed to János Czeglédi, Olahus' *provisor*, but none of the replies from Czeglédi.

However, these numbers and their ratio should not mislead us, since they do not show the real intensity of the correspondence and/or depth of the friendships. It was a privilege to be in correspondence with Erasmus, as well as with Cornelius Scepperus, who was the envoy of German king and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V with Ferdinand I. In the same way, bishop of Eger Tamás Szalaházy was the chancellor of Hungarian king Ferdinand, and publishing his correspondence with Imre Kálnay¹⁴, even though Kálnay belonged to the other camp as one of the most loyal men of János Szapolyai, can easily be justified: beside the above-mentioned Kálnay letter, Oláh only included his own letters written to Kálnay in the collection of *Epistolae familiares*, in all of which he chastises Kálnay and encourages him to return to the righteous path.¹⁵

Personae gratae (?)	Letters (pieces)	Personae non gratae (?)	Letters (pieces)
Cornelius Schepperus	47	Johannes Henckel	5
Thomas episcopus Agriensis	36	Nicolaus Thuroczy	3
Camillus Gilinus	29	Franciscus Ujlaki	5
Erasmus Roterodamus	29	Thomas Nadasdy	2
Johannes archiepiscopus Lundensis	23	Johannes A. Brassicanus	1
Levinus Ammonius	17	...	
Alexius Thurzo	16		
Emericus Kalnay	16		
Petrus Nannius	16		
Ruthgerus Rescius	15		
Johannes Czeglédi	11		

Analyzing both the list of participants and the frequency of their correspondence in the collection is fraught with difficulties. Correspondents overwhelmingly include persons loyal to the Habsburg party (for example, Cor-

¹³ OLÁH, 1875, XII.

¹⁴ V. KOVÁCS, 1970, 667.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 665.

nelius Schepper, the Flemish counsellor and ambassador for the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, Ferdinand I of Austria, and Mary of Hungary, as well as Tamás Szalaházy, the Hungarian chancellor of Ferdinand I). By contrast, friends who criticized Ferdinand I or even John (I) Szapolyai's loyalists appear only occasionally. If they do occur, Olahus always castigates them for their political beliefs and tries to convince them to (re)turn to Queen Mary's service.

The limited number of letters between Olahus and Stephanus Brodericus is an excellent example for this. Though it is clear from other sources that they kept in touch despite their political stances and beliefs, Olahus omits his letters from his collection, except for eight examples. This is remarkable because in 1537 Olahus mourned the loss of Brodericus in a tearful epigram, which he sent to their common friend, Nádasdy, and he omitted this example from his collection. Reading the epigram, it is obvious that Olahus and Brodericus remained best friends until Brodericus' death, but this did not concern others.

Olahus does the same with the letters of Tamás Nádasdy, for the same reason. Only two pieces of their correspondence were copied into the collection, although there exist more than 110 unpublished letters between them, proving that they must have had an extensive correspondence. It is possible that they did not exchange letters during this period, since between 1528–1534 Nádasdy was tied to the enemy camp through his – allegedly forced – oath of allegiance to Szapolyai. However, it is much more likely that Olahus and Nádasdy did keep in touch via letters, as well as through other means of communication, which will be elaborated on in the next section. In any case, it is clear from the material of the 30 years following *Epistolae familiares* that Olahus and Nádasdy were in intense correspondence with each other until the latter's death in 1562, the tone of which testifies to a genuine friendship: there are more than 110 missives in the Nádasdy archive which were written by Olahus to Nádasdy or Nádasdy's wife, Orsolya Kanizsai,¹⁶ and the counterparts of these letters can also partly be found in the Oláh family archive.¹⁷

Conversely, the collection includes several of Cornelius Schepper's sometimes insignificant letters. Beside the letters concerning political beliefs, there is much correspondence with his Flemish friends, e.g. Erasmus of Rotterdam, Petrus Nannius, and Cornelius Grapheus.

Thus, it seems likely that while editing his *Epistolae familiares*, Oláh not only polished the sentences in the letters according to his political ambitions, but he already culled the letters he came across, based on their content or their author/addressee. Any number of letters could make it in if they were from a correspondent from the Ferdinand party, even if he was not a very close

¹⁶ Budapest, MNL OL, E 185 (Archivum familiae Nádasdy), Fasc. 26.

¹⁷ Budapest, MNL OL, P 184 (Oláh family)

acquaintance; however, politically suspect persons or those whose status had not been fully determined, fell victim to Olahus' censorship. To summarize, Olahus preferred two kinds of persons to be represented in his collection: those loyal to the Habsburgs and his illustrious Flemish friends.

II. D. TYPE THREE: CREDENTIAL LETTERS AND NON-EXISTING LETTERS

The third type of Olahus' censorship is more difficult to explain than the others. Here, I will talk about letters that never existed or were non-epistolary. Writing credential letters is a common form of censorship, but this is generally not so apparent because of the concealment involved. In the late 1520s and in the 1530s, because of the Ottoman attacks in Hungary, two contrasting phenomena emerged. On the one hand, many people were forced into exile, so they could only keep in touch with their loved ones via letters. This is the reason for the increasing frequency of letters in this period. On the other hand, the post roads were perilous, and messengers could not pass some letters to the addressees because of the frequent ambushes. This situation gave rise to credential letters, which were not formal enough to be included in a humanist collection of letters. Reading Olahus' collection, I have become aware of credential letters' existence several times. The most fascinating example is a letter of Olahus addressed to Nádasdy. He writes: "What you write about the messenger, I cannot understand. Write to me more clearly about him. If you would like to send me someone of yours, I will receive him gratefully. But if your wish is not to send anyone, express to me your will, and explain what you wrote about the messenger in your letter, because I cannot understand it. I would like to know what our John delivered to you. He might have said things I had not included. I see him as unreliable and neglectful in matters entrusted to his charge. I am afraid that he might tell you something that does not originate from me. You will be doing me a favor if you report his words. If he delivers the message faithfully, I will recommend him to you for his diligence and fidelity. But if he presents my thoughts differently from what I had intended, I shall inform you and correct his error."¹⁸ This paragraph shows that orality became more important than lit-

¹⁸ OLÁH, 1875, 23–24; OLAHUS, 2018, 83: "De tabellario quid mihi scribas non satis intelligo. Scribe ad me de eo certius; si quem tuorum ad me mittere voles, gratanter eum expectabo, vel si neminem mittere volueris significa mihi cuius sis voluntatis et in quam partem mihi litteris tuis scripseris de tabellario, nam eas non possum intelligere. Ioannes noster quid tibi retulerit, scire cupio, potuit enim talia dixisse, quae a me non habuit in mandatis; vidi eum esse varium et in rebus quae ei demandatur, plerumque negligentem, vereor ne ea tibi dixerit, quae a me non acceperit; facies igitur mihi gratum, si ipsius verba mihi significa-

eracy, and it was crucial to find a reliable messenger. Furthermore, a number of letters were not even written or preserved because orality had taken over their function. However, the quoted passage illustrates it well that topics that were really important, often personal or, as they involved politics, had to be concealed from others, Olahus often only communicated implicitly, through credential letters, or he did not write about them at all. This is not new either, let us just remember *Epistolarium* by Johannes (Vitéz) de Zredna, which also abounds in similar references to credential letters.¹⁹ Still, it is important to keep in mind that Olahus also wrote credential letters in important matters or sent envoys relatively frequently, so when mapping his network of relationships, we cannot stop at the data from the letters we know he did write, it is also worthwhile to examine references of the above nature.

III. SUMMARY

Editing Olahus' correspondence, I can see not only what he wanted to show to his readers but also the plans, thoughts, and ideas that he wanted to conceal. What he omitted from the collection I could only recognize but not present in the edition. This recognition helps me understand his strategies in building a brilliant career after Mohács in Hungary. If he was once called a Lutheran, he rejected this because he was establishing a Catholic ecclesiastical career. Even if he conducted an extensive correspondence with old friends, their political beliefs prevented him from portraying them as loved ones, since he wanted to seem loyal to the Habsburgs. Last but not least, as some of his letters were unpolished, rough, not good enough or too intimate for publication, he simply eliminated these because a humanist collection should contain only splendid and lucid examples. Understanding what he left out, readers can make more authentic conclusions about what he did include in the collection.

Through the title he selected, he also indicated which authorial tradition he wanted to continue: he was following in Cicero's and Petrarch's footsteps, although he also diverged from them in several respects. The most important of these is that the letters in all cases are real missives, or their edited versions. Another important difference is that the emphasis from letters to friends and family shifts to acquaintances of a representative nature: *Epistolae familiares*, as Olahus himself called it, is not so much *Letters to friends*, rather, as we would say it today, a political portfolio compiled to support a fledgling career.

ris, ut si legationem ei commissam fideliter peregerit, possim eum de diligentia et fidelitate commendare; sin secus mentem meam, quam per eum tibi significaram, aperte declarare et errorem ab eo commissum reformare.”

¹⁹ For more detail, see: SZILÁGYI, 2012, 202–203.

IV. AFTERWORD: THE NEW CRITICAL EDITION

As an afterword, I would like to say a few words about the new critical edition, particularly the censored elements of the text that I have referred to as Type One above.²⁰ Like other new critical editions (for example, the editions of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* in Munich), this new edition offers a critical apparatus and two types of notes. The first shows the text's literary sources or parallels, while the second presents contextualizing explanatory notes to the text. The new editorial principal rules of the series *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Medii Recentisque Aevorum Series Nova* have been elaborated by Enikő Békés and Sándor Bene.²¹ Of course, I generally follow their instructions. However, since I am preparing both printed and online versions (with photos to accompany the transliteration), I have standardized the text and use the standard Classical Latin orthography.

I cannot indicate in this edition whether Olahus omitted a letter that is no longer available, such as the examples of Type Two and Type Three. I can only register it and mention it in the notes. I need not highlight scribal errors or the scriptor's autocorrections, particularly if corrected by himself or by Olahus. At the same time, I naturally visualize Olahus' Type One corrections and censorships. I have prepared both the printed and the online versions with the Classical Text Editor. Linking the online version to international databases is in progress, and it will be launched at the end of this year. I hope the new edition will open a new era in the literature on Olahus, and through it we can all learn about him as well as his real plans, thoughts, and ideas.

EMŐKE RITA SZILÁGYI

²⁰ See the PDF-version: <http://reciti.hu/2019/4989>

²¹ BÉKÉS – BENE, 2014.

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